

Department of Development and Environmental Services



King County



Customer Newsletter

September 2010

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Over-the-counter, one-day permitting begins October 18, 2010 for many DDES permit types

The weeks-long wait for review of many building and land use permits in King County will soon be a thing of the past. Beginning Monday, October 18, DDES will provide expedited, one-day or "over the counter" review processes for many permit types.

"It does not make sense for someone who needs a quick oil change to have to wait in line behind someone who needs their engine rebuilt," said King County Executive Dow Constantine. "This change brings that same logical approach to our permitting services, and will save our customers time, money and aggravation."

Under the guidance of the Executive's reform agenda, DDES employees themselves designed the streamlined process by which customers who need a simple permit will be able to walk into the Permit Center without an appointment, submit an application, and obtain their permit on the same day.

"It has been awkward to talk to people about our 'over-the-counter' permits when they have to wait weeks and weeks for an appointment just to get to the counter," said DDES Director John Starbard. "The reforms we're making at DDES will make our services easier, more accessible, and more predictably-priced."

Permits that can be obtained "over-the-counter" beginning on Monday, October 18, will include small residential remodels, tenant improvements to commercial spaces, building additions, decks, seismic retrofits, and many others. Appointments will still be required for complex development proposals.

Customers who prefer to make an appointment in advance for simpler permit types will still have that option.

DDES offered walk-in permit services in the past, but in the late 1990's the department was compelled to move to an appointment system due to a surge in construction and other permitting activity. The current lower volume of permit applications and a smaller customer base due to annexations and incorporations makes it possible to return to a walk-in system for many permit types.

A team of front-line staff and supervisors worked to redesign the permitting process, leveraging their practical, daily experience to create a new, more streamlined, efficient and effective system.

Jarrold Lewis, DDES Assistant Supervisor for the Planning and Customer Services Section, worked on the reform effort and said, "It has been very rewarding to see our staff come together and develop service improvements that enable us to work more efficiently while also truly benefitting our customers."

For additional information on over-the-counter permitting at DDES, please contact Jim Chan, DDES Building and Fire Services Division Director at 206-296-6740.

DDES customer service numbers

DDES General Customer Assistance

206-296-6600

Permit Application Appointments

206-296-6797

Billing Hotline

206-296-6659

DDES Records Center

206-296-6696

Media and Public Disclosure Inquiries

206-296-6682

DDES Director, John Starbard

206-296-6700

Building and Fire Svcs. Director, Jim Chan

206-296-6740

Permit Center, Jarrod Lewis

206-296-6713

Plan Review, Chris Ricketts

206-296-6750

Building Inspections, Bernard Moore

206-296-6762

Code Enforcement Customer Service)

206-296-6680

Current Planning, Lisa Dinsmore

206-296-7171

Land Use Division Director, Randy Sandin

206-296-6778

Engineering, Molly Johnson

206-296-7178

Clearing & Grading, Steve Bottheim

206-296-7144

Critical Areas, Steve Bottheim

206-296-7144

2011 will bring fee reform to DDES

Fixed fees allow for more efficient permitting and improved customer service

King County Executive Dow Constantine has transmitted a report to the King County Council outlining his strategic plan for a new fee structure and improved customer service at the Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES).

DDES has developed an alternative rate model for 2011 based largely on fixed fees. Such a fee structure will give applicants more certainty up front about the cost of permits and will fundamentally change the service culture at DDES: front-line staff will be able to concentrate more on quality service to each customer and less on meeting department standards for billable hours.

King County Executive Dow Constantine said, "A fee structure dependent on billable hours limits the amount of time that staff are able to give to a customer. A new fee structure emphasizing flat fees offers permit customers the predictability they deserve, and everyone will be more satisfied with a DDES culture that is tailored to the needs of individual permit customers."

DDES will be publishing more information on fee structure revisions in the coming weeks and months. For additional information, please contact Jim Chan, DDES Building and Fire Services Division Director, at 206-296-6740.

More DDES outreach and customer service initiatives for 2010 and 2011

In the 20 years since the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) was adopted, King County has seen the incorporation of ten new cities and the annexation of thousands of acres of formerly urban unincorporated lands. As a consequence, the DDES service area has been significantly reduced and its workload has also changed: the majority of permits now being processed consist of basic and custom home construction, building additions, agricultural projects, and mining and forestry permits. These changes are driving other DDES customer services initiatives which include:

Work in Partnership with Stakeholders

DDES has been proactive in reaching out to stakeholders whose input will be critical to the department's success. These stakeholders include the development community, the Master Builders Association, the environmental community, Unincorporated Area Councils, the Municipal League, other permitting agencies, union representatives, and staff. In the coming weeks and months, as the department sharpens its rural focus, DDES will reach out to key rural stakeholders and to community groups in parts of the County where there are no Unincorporated Area Councils.

Work in Partnership with Annexing Cities

Today, there are only a handful of cities in King County that have major annexations yet to complete. To facilitate these remaining annexations so that urban areas are appropriately within the boundaries of incorporated cities, the County will seek more customized solutions with cities to meet their individual interests, thereby encouraging those areas to annex as soon as possible.

Approach Planning from a Local Government Perspective

As DDES focuses its services on the unincorporated rural areas, it will take a closer look at existing policies and regulations to see if there are better ways to balance the interests of applicants with the need to protect the environment. There may be some standards that were appropriate for urban unincorporated areas that do not necessarily fit into the rural context.

Relocate Offices Closer to the DDES Customer Base

When DDES moved to its Black River Campus in Renton in 1997, Renton was near the geographic center of the department service area. Today, however, with all the major annexations nearly complete, the majority of DDES customers will be in the unincorporated Woodinville/Duvall and Auburn areas and on Vashon Island. DDES is working to develop proposals for new office locations that are more convenient and accessible to these populations.

Permit Integration

DDES has been leading a multi-department effort to implement new permitting software that will link the permit processes between DDES, the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, the Department of Executive Services and Public Health – Seattle and King County. This extensive project, which is due to be rolled out in mid-2011, will improve permit monitoring, provide digital access to application plans and documents, facilitate records downloads and updates from the field, broaden the range of permits that can be applied for online, eliminate redundancy, better enable consecutive permit review, and allow payments by credit card and access 24-hours a day. Customers will be *online* instead of *in line*.